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Electoral Incentives and Partisan Conflict in Congress: Evidence from Survey Experiments

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Does partisan conflict damage citizens' perceptions of Congress? If so, why has polarization increased in Congress since the 1970s? To address these questions, we unpack the "electoral connection" by exploring the mass public's attitudes toward partisan conflict via two survey experiments in which we manipulated characteristics of members and Congress. We find that party conflict reduces confidence in Congress among citizens across the partisan spectrum. However, there exists heterogeneity by strength of party identification with respect to evaluations of members. Independents and weak partisans are more supportive of members who espouse a bipartisan image, whereas strong partisans are less supportive. People with strong attachments to a political party disavow conflict in the aggregate but approve of individual members behaving in a partisan manner. This pattern helps us understand why members in safely partisan districts engage in partisan conflict even though partisanship damages the collective reputation of the institution.

The rise in partisan polarization since the 1970s has been one of the most extensively studied topics in congressional scholarship in recent years (e.g., Aldrich, Berger, and Rohde 2002; Han and Brady 2007; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006; Poole and Rosenthal 1997; Theriault 2008a). Most of the literature on polarization in Congress has focused on the behavior of legislators themselves within the framework of the institution, hoping to identify both the causes and consequences of the increasing partisan divide (e.g., Cox and Katz 2002; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006; Roberts and Smith 2003; Stonecash, Brewer, and Mariani 2002). Nonetheless, it is puzzling that Congress is more polarized than the mass public, despite a continued emphasis on an "electoral connection" between members and the public. Much of the literature on polarization has reconciled this puzzle by focusing on institutional explanations for why members are incentivized to move away from the median voter (e.g., party pressure, primaries, redistricting, etc.). Less attention has been paid to the behavioral underpinnings of polarization. In this article, we seek to unpack

the "electoral connection" via an examination of the mass public's attitudes toward partisan conflict in Congress. To do so, we conducted two original survey experiments as part of the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) in which we manipulated characteristics of individual members and Congress and then measured people's attitudes toward members and the institution as a whole.

Previous research using aggregate and individual-level data shows that partisan conflict has decreased Americans' confidence in and approval of Congress as an institution (e.g., Ramirez 2009), suggesting that the polarization of Congress reflects a failure of public preferences to translate into legislative behavior. This article reconsiders this claim by distinguishing how citizens evaluate the behavior of individual members from the performance of the institution. Existing literature suggests a number of possible relationships between preferences for partisanship from individual members and from Congress as a whole. For instance, theories of party cues, party rationalization, and party branding (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960;

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Grynaviski 2010; Rahn 1993) suggest that the public may have preferences for partisanship among members and in the institution. In contrast, previous findings of general unhappiness with discord in Congress (e.g., Durr, Martin, and Wolbrecht 1997; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995; Kimball and Patterson 1997) would predict preferences for bipartisanship among members and in the institution. Another possible, though less theoretically grounded, relationship is a preference for bipartisanship among members but partisanship in the institution. None of these relationships, however, explain why we have observed persistent polarization and discord in Congress even though partisanship hurts the collective reputation of the institution and goes against calls by the public for greater bipartisanship. To explain this puzzle, and the behavioral underpinnings of polarization, we argue that although the public as a whole may express a desire for greater bipartisanship in Congress as an institution, not all groups wish to see individual members compromising for the sake of bipartisanship. In particular, we argue that strong partisans in the electorate, who are least likely to desire bipartisan activity from their representatives, incentivize members to engage in partisan conflict.

The article proceeds as follows. In the first section, we provide an overview of the electoral connection and a theoretical basis for our hypotheses concerning how different segments of the public respond to partisan activity in Congress. Additionally, we present some empirical regularities on district preferences and the degree of partisan behavior to motivate the analyses. We then present the designs of the two experimental studies, the results, and their implications for the study of polarization and party conflict in Congress. The implications of the study shed light on both the behavioral underpinnings of polarization as well as on the paradoxical pattern of negative evaluations of Congress and positive evaluations of individual members noted by Fenno and others. In doing so, we not only reinterpret these existing observations but also present a new “paradox” to add alongside Fenno’s: citizens disapprove of Congress because it is composed of officials with characteristics they like.

Partisan Conflict and the Electoral Connection

Challenging Downs’s (1957) prediction that politicians should converge to the position of the median voter, scholars have recently asked, “Whatever happened to the median voter? Rather than attempt to move her ‘off the fence’ or ‘swing’ her from one party to another, today’s

campaigners seem to be ignoring her” (Fiorina 1999, 3). Although it is unlikely that complete convergence occurs between candidates (e.g., Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2001; Miller and Stokes 1963), many scholars have nonetheless suggested that members seek to be representative of their constituents lest they face electoral defeat (Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2002; Erikson 1978; Erikson and Wright 1980).

In contrast to solely focusing on electoral competition in a Downsian space, recent work on legislative behavior has taken an alternative approach to understanding representation and nonconvergence to the median by examining institutional explanations for polarization. For instance, members can face tensions between their party and constituency, particularly for cross-pressured members in competitive districts. This research suggests that some members find it easier to converge to the median than others. Many studies of political parties focus on the positive electoral benefits of the party brand (Grynaviski 2010) and the need for collective action in order to enact a legislative agenda (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005). Parties provide a number of tangible resources to members, including campaign funding, valuable committee assignments, and deal making to shepherd legislation introduced by the member (Smith 2007). Members who are loyal to the party and vote the party line are much more likely to receive these benefits than are disloyal members. Much of this research suggests that there are benefits to voting with the party even if a member’s district preferences lean away from the party position on a particular bill (Aldrich 1995; Rohde 1991). Thus, partisan conflict in Congress may reflect party influence on members (Fiorina and Levendusky 2006).

In many cases, members’ partisan and constituent interests are reinforcing. However, some members are pulled in opposite directions by party and constituency interests (Bond and Fleisher 1990). These cross-pressured members may have the most to lose from engaging in partisan behavior. Many party theorists find that members who are cross-pressured by their party and constituency may be able to break party discipline on certain votes. As noted by Lebo, McGlynn, and Koger (2007), party unity is a double-edged sword—it increases the likelihood of legislative success but can also expose members in moderate districts to electoral defeat. Similarly, Patty notes that a “fundamental tension occurs when [a] member’s individual and collective interests are in conflict” (2008, 640).

The rise of polarization in Congress since the 1970s has led scholars to question whether members are following the party rather than their constituents, leading to a decline in responsiveness to constituent interests and thus

to the median voter (Fiorina and Levendusky 2006). Our analysis suggests that party polarization is not incompatible with responsiveness to a member's constituents, as members may focus their actions on winning support in a narrower constituency than the geographic constituency (Fenno 1978). In particular, we focus on the differential preferences of strong partisans and other individuals (including weak partisans and independents), whose electoral influence may vary by district type.

In addition to party pressure, primary competition may cause members not to adopt the preferences of the median constituent in their districts. A member may face a competitive primary election challenge from within his or her own party (Brady, Han, and Pope 2007) and/or a strong general election challenge from the opposing party (Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2002). Previous research has found that the electoral stage at which members expect an electoral challenger affects legislative behavior and coalition formation (Crisp, Kanthak, and Leijonhufvud 2004; Kanthak and Crisp 2005). The logic is that members who represent competitive districts (i.e., those that the opposing party has a chance of winning), and where the challenge is likely to come in a general election, will have the incentive to work across the aisle and engage in bipartisan collaboration. In contrast, members who represent districts that are safely Democratic (or Republican), and thus where the challenge is more likely to come in a primary election, may engage in partisan behavior in an attempt to shore up support from strong partisans, who make up a larger portion of the primary electorate (Geer 1988; Grofman 1993; Norrander 1989). While competitive primary and general elections are not mutually exclusive, we can think of members as focusing on gaining support from specific reelection constituencies, which will be related to where they anticipate challengers. Further, even in the general election, strong partisans are more likely to turn out to vote (e.g., Wattenberg and Briens 1999),¹ and the median voter in these districts is more likely to be a strong partisan, thereby incentivizing the member to engage in partisan legislative discord (consistent with electorally responsive behavior).

Hence, building on Mayhew's (1974) central premise that members of Congress are "single-minded reelection seekers," we argue that the electoral incentives of members influence the level of partisan conflict in Congress.²

¹ For instance, in the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Study, strong partisans exhibited a turnout rate 11 percentage points higher than weak partisans and Independents ($p < .001$). An even larger difference of 21 percentage points was observed in the 2008 American National Election Study ($p < .001$).

² Although the survey experiments in this article focus on the observable aspects of legislative behavior, it is important to note that in

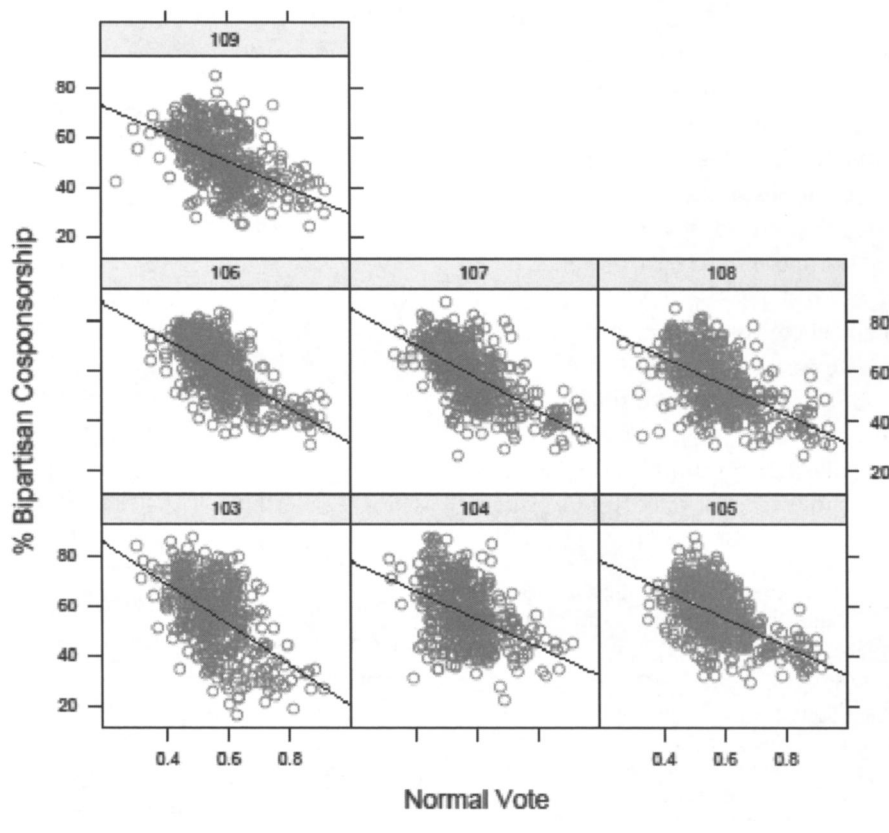
Rather than just focusing on institutional features that incentivize members, however, we bring together the behavioral and institutional bases of partisan conflict. Following Ramirez (2009), we use the term "partisan conflict" loosely to refer to any outcome or scenario where Democrats and Republicans do not appear to be working together to achieve common goals.³ This includes party-line voting on roll calls, partisan composition of cosponsorship coalitions, acrimonious floor speeches and rhetoric, and the use of procedural tactics against the opposing party.⁴ For instance, studies of partisan polarization in Congress consider partisan homogeneity in roll-call voting as a sign of conflict and a lack of bipartisan cooperation. In conceptualizing party conflict, we purposely adopt a broad definition since citizens may have differing interpretations and reactions to various forms of congressional behavior. We hypothesize that voters who are Independents and weak partisans prefer that their member engage in bipartisan activities, whereas strong partisans prefer partisan behavior as a result of their greater likelihood of agreement with, and attachment to, their political party. Accordingly, members of Congress have incentives to exhibit a certain mix of bipartisan and partisan behavior depending on the composition of their districts and which electoral stage they expect competition.

Aggregate-level data show that members from competitive (general election) districts are less likely to engage in partisan conflict and more likely to behave in a manner that might be classified as bipartisan. These behaviors include (1) voting with opposing partisans on roll calls with greater frequency and (2) joining cosponsorship coalitions with members of the opposing party. With respect to roll-call voting, Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan (2002) analyze congressional elections from 1956 to 1996 and find that, when controlling for district preferences (measured by the normal presidential vote) and a range of other factors, members with more extreme voting records (i.e., more liberal or conservative than the district median voter) are less likely to be reelected as compared to

the real world, legislative behavior may reflect both preferences and strategies. That is, when a member of Congress chooses a certain mix of partisan and bipartisan behaviors that reflects the preferences of the district median, this may reflect the member's own preferences (in which case the voters were able to select a member whose own positions reflect the median voter) or it may reflect a strategic choice by the member.

³ Ramirez (2009) specifically operationalizes partisan conflict as the percentage of roll-call votes in which at least 75% of Democrats vote against at least 75% of Republicans.

⁴ We will not be examining all of these sources of partisan conflict, but rather only those which are most empirically tractable to test comparative statics in an experimental setting.

FIGURE 1 Regression of Bipartisanship on Normal Vote

their colleagues whose voting behavior better represents their districts. In every election year between 1956 and 1996, roll-call extremity has a negative effect on members' general election vote share, even when controlling for factors such as challenger quality and spending. Substantively, a 25-point shift in a member's Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) score away from the median voter (an approximately one standard deviation shift) decreases a member's vote share by 1 to 3 percentage points (Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2002, 133). They find that this pattern is true across types of districts. For members in both marginal and safe seats, the extremity of a member's ADA score relative to his or her district's preferences adversely affects the probability of reelection. Since competitive districts have more moderate median voters, members who represent these districts will have more moderate voting records than members of more liberal (or conservative) districts where the median voter pulls the member toward the ideological poles. Similar results are found by Carson et al. (2010), who focus specifically on partisanship rather than ideological extremity.

We find similar results using bill cosponsorship coalitions—members from more centrist districts are more likely to engage in bipartisan cosponsorship. In

some ways, cosponsorship is an even better metric than roll-call votes in assessing strategic decision making on the part of congresspersons because bill cosponsorship is in the purview of individual members and is less likely to be subject to agenda control (Kessler and Krehbiel 1996; Krehbiel 1995). Whereas previous work on cosponsorship tends to focus on the frequency of cosponsoring (Campbell 1982) or on the dyadic patterns of cosponsorship (Fowler 2006), we focus on the relative incidence of partisan and bipartisan cosponsorship, similar to roll-call analyses that examine the extremity of a member's voting position.⁵ In Figure 1, we plot district⁶ preferences

⁵ There is a smaller body of work that has looked more directly at the bipartisan nature of cosponsorship coalitions, including the signaling explanation posited by Kessler and Krehbiel (1996), as well as working papers on bipartisan cooperation and polarization (Harbridge 2009; Theriault 2008b). The latter work examines differences in patterns of bipartisanship between cosponsorship and roll-call votes. Our analysis uniquely explores the effects of district characteristics on bipartisan cosponsorship.

⁶ Cosponsorship data from Fowler (2006). All districts (where data are available) are included. This includes districts that were redistricted. Ideally, instances where a district boundary was redrawn would be omitted. However, our data only include an indicator for whether a district is in a state that was redistricted, meaning

(proxied by the normal presidential vote⁷ in the district) against the percentage of the member's cosponsorships that are bipartisan for the 103rd–109th Congresses. Lower values of the normal vote indicate districts that are more competitive for the incumbent party. A member is coded as engaging in a bipartisan cosponsorship if he or she cosponsors a bill on which at least 20% of the bill's cosponsors are from the party opposite the party of the bill's original sponsor.⁸ All other cosponsorships are considered partisan cosponsorships. As is clear from the figure, members from moderate districts (i.e., normal votes near 50% or less) are more likely to cosponsor legislation with members of the opposite party.

This relationship is robust to the inclusion of several member-level control variables (majority party status, gender, age, tenure, leadership position) and Congress-level controls—divided government, majority seat share,

that removing these cases leaves minimal observations in the 103rd (1992) and 108th (2002) Congresses. As a result, redistricted cases are a source of measurement error.

⁷ Following Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan (2002) and Levendusky, Pope, and Jackman (2008), we operationalize the normal presidential vote as the mean two-party presidential vote in the previous two elections by the party of the incumbent representative. For instance, if the member is a Republican we use the mean Republican presidential vote in the last two presidential elections, and if the member is a Democrat we use the mean Democratic presidential vote in the last two presidential elections. Hence, higher values of this variable indicate more extreme districts, whereas lower values represent more moderate, competitive districts.

⁸ Results are consistent when using alternate definitions of bipartisanship, including 30%, 40%, and 50% cutoffs. Online Appendix Table A1 replicates the OLS results in Table 1 using these alternate specifications. In each case, the normal presidential vote has a significant and negative effect on the frequency of bipartisan cosponsorship. Additionally, to verify that those bills classified as bipartisan are distinct from those bills classified as partisan in the analysis (using the 20% threshold), we focused on just those bills that receive a roll-call vote and examined the probability that each type of bill—partisan and bipartisan by cosponsorship—receives a bipartisan roll-call vote. That is, of all bipartisan (or partisan) cosponsored bills that face a roll-call vote, what proportion end up having a bipartisan roll-call vote (as defined by the CQ measure)? Data from the Policy Agendas Project (Baumgartner and Jones 2000), Rohde's dataset of House roll-call votes (2004), and the bill cosponsorship measures indicate that between one-fifth and two-fifths of bills with bipartisan cosponsors that reach roll-call votes result in a bipartisan vote. The average for 1993 through 2000 (the last year in which all three data sources are available) is approximately one-third. In contrast, between one-twentieth and one-fifth (with an average of 0.17) of bills with partisan cosponsors that reach roll-call votes result in a bipartisan vote. Although it is not impossible for partisan cosponsored bills to result in a bipartisan roll-call vote, it is rare. In all years, bills with bipartisan cosponsorship coalitions are more likely to result in a bipartisan roll-call vote than bills with partisan cosponsorship coalitions. This suggests that the cosponsorship measure is capturing important variation and that the importance of this variation extends to voting patterns in the chamber as a whole.

TABLE 1 Regressions Predicting Percent of Cosponsored Bills That Are Bipartisan by Member (103rd–109th Congresses)

	OLS	Quasi-Binomial	OLS	Quasi-Binomial
Normal	-.61***	-.02***	-.18***	-.01***
Presidential Vote	(.02)	(.001)	(.03)	(.001)
Majority Party	.26	.07***	-3.30***	-.13***
Member	(.38)	(.02)	(.37)	(.02)
Female	-3.44***	-.14***	–	–
Age	(.56)	(.02)	–	–
Age	.01	.00	–	–
Tenure	(.02)	(.001)	–	–
Tenure	.24***	.01**	–	–
House Leadership	(.05)	(.002)	–	–
House Leadership	-12.40***	-.54***	-2.05	-.12
Divided	(1.72)	(.08)	(1.86)	(.08)
Divided	3.86***	.19***	3.13***	.17***
Government	(.47)	(.02)	(.33)	(.01)
Majority	.01	.00	-.13	-.002
Seat Share	(.09)	(.003)	(.07)	(.003)
Presidential	2.45**	.12***	2.58***	.13***
Election Year	(.78)	(.03)	(.47)	(.02)
Constant	87.00***	1.43***	88.60***	1.36*
Member Fixed	(5.36)	(.21)	(7.42)	(.60)
Effects	No	No	Yes	Yes
N	3033	3033	3033	3033
R ²	.34	–	.83	–

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05 (two-tailed).

and presidential election years.⁹ As shown in the first two columns of Table 1, there exists an inverse relationship between the normal vote and bipartisan cosponsorship activity, either estimating an OLS model or a quasi-binomial model¹⁰ to predict the frequency of bipartisan cosponsorship. Moving from a competitive district where the normal presidential vote is 50% to a moderately safe district where the normal vote is 60% corresponds to a 6.1% decrease in the percent of bills cosponsored by

⁹ Data from the Congressional Bills Project (Adler and Wilkerson 2008), the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (1997), Volden and Wiseman (2009), and updated by the authors.

¹⁰ The quasi-binomial model examines the number of successes that occur in a specific number of trials. Applied to the question at hand, "successes" are bipartisan cosponsorship coalitions and the number of trials is the number of bills that a member cosponsors. A quasi-binomial, rather than a binomial, model is used to allow for overdispersion in the dependent variable.

the member that are bipartisan. Over the period of analysis, the median member cosponsored 101 bipartisan bills (out of a total 180 cosponsored), so a 6.1% effect is equivalent to decreasing the number of bipartisan bills by 11. Alternatively, we can consider the percentage of bills that a member cosponsors and its range in the data. For the period of analysis, the interquartile range is bounded by 47% and 65% bipartisan cosponsorships, with a median of 56%. Thus, the magnitude of the effect of the normal vote is quite substantial when considering where in the distribution it would move a member. Looking at a few examples from California illustrates this pattern. The normal presidential vote in Representative Jim Costa's (CA-20, Dem) Fresno district is 51% Democratic and in the 109th Congress 59% of the bills that he cosponsored were bipartisan. In contrast, the normal presidential vote is 87% Democratic in the nearby Berkeley and Oakland areas and only 24% of the bills that Representative Barbara Lee (CA-9, Dem) cosponsored were bipartisan.

District preferences not only explain between-member variation in bipartisan activity but also within-member variation across time. In the third and fourth columns of Table 1, we include fixed effects for members.¹¹ In both the OLS and quasi-binomial models, even when controlling for member fixed effects and Congress-level variables, the normal presidential vote exerts a significant negative effect on bipartisan cooperation. Drawing on the third model, a 10% increase in the normal vote is associated with nearly a 2% decrease in bipartisan cooperation. While substantively smaller than the effects that examine variation between members, this effect still shows the pull of a member's constituency. That is, when a member's district becomes more partisan, the member's bipartisan cooperation declines. Indeed, there have been some notable cases of members becoming more frequent bipartisan cosponsors as their district becomes more moderate. Consider the example of Steve Chabot (OH-1), a Republican who represented southwestern Ohio from 1995 to 2008. Between the 104th and 107th Congresses,¹² the normal Republican presidential vote in this district declined from 57% to 47%. Over this period, the percent of his cosponsorship coalitions that were bipartisan increased from 41% to 55%. Certainly, district preferences are not the only factors that explain legislative bipartisanship.¹³

¹¹ Due to the inclusion of member fixed effects, time-invariant variables drop out of the model specifications.

¹² The 108th and 109th Congresses are omitted from this illustration because of redistricting.

¹³ Bipartisan cooperation could occur through shared features of members that are unrelated to district preferences. A full dyadic member-to-member model specification with controls for re-

However, these patterns suggest that bipartisan cooperation, like patterns of legislative extremism more generally, are strongly related to district preferences. Further, the propensity to reach across the aisle is not simply a fixed characteristic of a member. Rather, it endogenously changes in response to electoral and strategic incentives. The implication of this fact is that district-level changes in the composition of voters—either through redistricting, mobility, or political and demographic shifts—can significantly alter the legislative dynamics in Congress even if the composition of the legislature remains the same.

These empirical patterns suggest that there may be a differential desire for bipartisanship within the public. Accordingly, we turn from looking at district types to analyzing individual-level behavior. Whereas voters who are strong partisans may not want their copartisan representative to compromise his or her beliefs in order to reach agreement with the other party, people less attached to or aligned with a political party may believe that compromise and collaboration are the basis of effective government. Hence, the composition of individual voters underlying district preferences should lead some members to engage in behavior contributing to party conflict and others to engage in bipartisan behavior. The experiments presented in this article explore the individual-level dynamics that underlie this electoral connection.

Experimental Studies

To empirically evaluate whether partisan polarization affects mass perceptions of Congress as an institution and support for individual members, we conducted two survey experiments over the Internet as part of the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) administered by YouGov/Polimetrix.

The CCES preelection wave was conducted during October 2008, and the postelection wave was conducted two weeks following Election Day (November 4, 2008). In addition to common content questions administered to 32,800 respondents, 1,000 respondents participated in our experimental module.¹⁴ All experiments were

region/state and veterans status, among other things, is beyond the scope of the analysis (which looks at each member across all bills). However, even when we condition on region and veterans status, the effect of the normal presidential vote on bipartisan cosponsorship frequency is statistically significant in all specifications (see online Appendix Tables A2 and A3).

¹⁴ Respondents participated in both experiments, thereby creating a 2 × 2 design. Using Transue, Lee, and Aldrich's (2009) procedures, we find no spillover effects between the different experiments.

conducted in the preelection wave and were placed after the common content on the questionnaire.

The CCES uses YouGov/Polimetrix's matched random sample methodology (Ansolabehere 2009). This procedure uses matching to select representative samples from nonrandomly selected pools of respondents. After a target sample, or random sample from the target population, is drawn, each member of the target sample is matched to an individual in the pool of opt-in survey respondents. Matching is based on demographics, voter, and consumer characteristics. The matched cases are then weighted using propensity scores. The resulting sample is a nationally representative panel of U.S. adults. Differences between this method and random digit dialing methods administered during the 2008 election were slight (Ansolabehere 2009). As shown in online Appendix A4, distributions of gender, age, race, education, and partisanship were generally similar to those in the 2008 American National Election Study, which was administered face-to-face to a probability sample. All of the experiments presented actual data to respondents and required no deception, thereby enhancing the ecological validity of the findings. Randomization was successful. As shown in online Appendix A5, experimental conditions were balanced on observables.

Study 1: Evaluations of Congress

Although the dominant view has been that “members are not held individually responsible for their collective performance in governing” (Jacobson 2004, 227) and Fenno (1978) suggests that members of Congress can make up for negative evaluations of Congress by running against Washington, there are a number of recent studies that indicate that aggregate approval or confidence of Congress is politically important. First, approval of individual members and approval of Congress track closely over time even if they have very different intercepts (Born 1990; Kimball 2005; Ramirez 2009). Thus, “an unpopular Congress may harm the reelection chances of incumbents and members of the majority party” (Kimball 2005, 64). Recent work by Jones (2010) finds that party polarization has increased the magnitude of the relationship between congressional approval and incumbent vote shares. Second, negative evaluations of Congress may discourage prospective politicians from serving (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2001, 145; Kimball 2005). Third, negative evaluations may disincentivize current politicians from tackling difficult but important policy issues (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2001, 145). Finally, low levels of trust in government may

lead the public to be less supportive of policies that incur real costs but yield little direct benefits to some citizens, including race-conscious and social welfare policies (Hetherington and Globetti 2002).

Design

To examine how perceptions of party conflict affect opinions of Congress as an institution, we conducted a survey experiment in which we manipulated the extent to which Congress was portrayed as being a place where members of opposite parties cooperated and worked together. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In the first “partisan” condition, respondents were provided the following information:

In a recent session of the United States House, about 30% of legislation that was introduced had bipartisan support—that is, it had support from significant numbers of both Democrats and Republicans.

In the second “bipartisan” condition, respondents were shown the following blurb:

In a recent session of the United States House, about 80% of legislation that became law had bipartisan support—that is, it had support from significant numbers of both Democrats and Republicans.

The information in both blurbs is accurate. Note that we are able to manipulate the level of party conflict and still remain truthful by distinguishing between bill introductions and bill passage.¹⁵ Although this distinction may be substantively meaningful to some respondents, we believe that is unlikely, especially since respondents saw only one of the two blurbs. More important, although that technical distinction might affect their view of specific pieces of legislation, it should not affect how they view the institution as a whole. Hence, our manipulation is able to present respondents with two different levels of party conflict while holding other features of Congress constant.

¹⁵ The estimates of party conflict in introduced and passed legislation refer to the percent of bills that were bipartisan in their cosponsorship stage. That is, 30% of all introduced bills had bipartisan cosponsors (defined as bills where at least 20% of the cosponsors were from the party opposite the party of the bill's sponsor) and 80% of bills that became public law were bipartisan in their cosponsorship stage.

Measures

After the blurb about the extent of partisan conflict was presented, respondents were asked, “Based on this information, how much confidence do you have in the U.S. Congress?”¹⁶ with the following five response options: “a great deal,” “a lot,” “a moderate amount,” “a little,” and “none.” The main independent variable was a dummy indicating whether respondents were assigned to the condition presenting Congress as bipartisan, with the partisan presentation as the baseline. Although we did not explicitly provide a control condition,¹⁷ the common content did include an item asking respondents about their overall approval of Congress on a 4-point scale ranging from “strongly disapprove” to “strongly approve” (question CC335con), which can be used as a baseline.

Methods

In order to estimate the overall treatment effect, we estimated the following regression model via ordinary least squares:¹⁸

$$C_i = \alpha + \beta_1 B_i + \beta_2 SR_i + \beta_3 WR_i + \beta_4 WD_i + \beta_5 SD_i + \gamma x_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where i indexes respondent; C_i represents confidence in Congress; B_i represents the bipartisanship treatment dummy; SR_i , WR_i , WD_i , and SD_i are dummy variables representing strong Republicans, weak Republicans, weak Democrats, and strong Democrats, respectively (with Independents as the omitted group);¹⁹ x_i represents a

vector of demographic controls; and ε_i represents stochastic error. The coefficient estimate of β_1 represents the treatment effect of the bipartisan information.

To assess the moderating effect of partisanship, we estimated the following model:

$$C_i = \alpha + \beta_1 B_i + \beta_2 SR_i + \beta_3 WR_i + \beta_4 WD_i + \beta_5 SD_i + \beta_6 (SR_i \times B_i) + \beta_7 (WR_i \times B_i) + \beta_8 (WD_i \times B_i) + \beta_9 (SD_i \times B_i) + \gamma x_i + \varepsilon_i. \quad (2)$$

β_1 represents the treatment effect among Independents. The interpretation of the interaction terms is as follows. $\beta_1 + \beta_6$ represents the treatment effect among strong Republicans whereas β_6 represents the *difference* in the treatment effect between strong Republicans and Independents.

We included control variables for age, gender, race, education, and media use.²⁰ Although the treatment was randomly assigned and we can obtain an unbiased estimate of the causal effect in the absence of these controls, we included them to increase the efficiency of the estimates. Additionally, they provide baselines with which to assess the substantive significance of the treatment effects. All variables were coded to lie between zero and one, meaning that we can interpret a one-unit change in an independent variable (i.e., going from the lowest value to the highest value) as inducing a 100β percentage-point change in the dependent variable.²¹

Results

When the legislative activity of Congress is framed as being characterized by partisan conflict, people have less confidence in the legislative branch as an institution. As illustrated in Figure 2, confidence in Congress is higher among *all* partisan groups in the “bipartisan” condition compared to the “partisan” condition. Regression results

publican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?” We considered the follow-up question which assessed whether individuals were “strong” or “not strong” Republicans and Democrats to separate strong and weak partisans. We treated those who did not answer “Republican” or “Democrat” as Independents.

²⁰ We also estimated specifications controlling for a consumer confidence index and obtained similar results (see online Appendix Tables A8 and A9). We do not report these results here because of missing data on the consumer confidence measures.

²¹ Age was coded to lie between 0 (youngest person in dataset) and 1 (oldest person in dataset). For gender and race, males and nonwhites were the excluded categories, respectively. Education was linearly coded to lie on a 4-point scale between 0 (less than a high school education) and 1 (college graduates). Media use was linearly coded to lie on a 5-point scale between 0 (used zero media sources) and 1 (used four media sources).

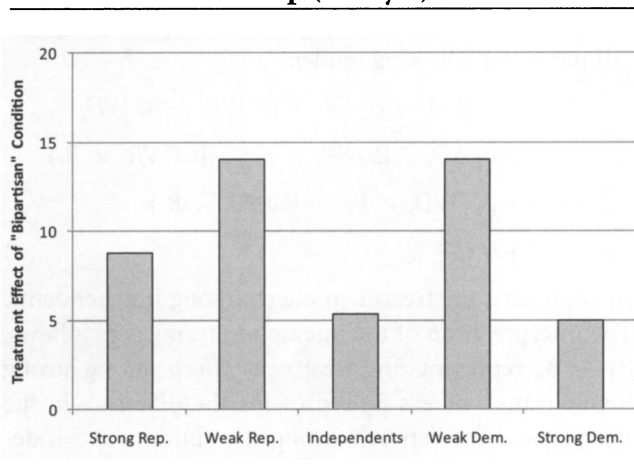
¹⁶ The question wording of “confidence in Congress” was adapted from an item used in Harris surveys. The polychoric correlation between confidence in Congress and approval of Congress (which was asked as part of the common content questionnaire) is $r = .70$.

¹⁷ As Gaines, Kuklinski, and Quirk (2007) argue, a control condition is not necessary in this study because we are not concerned with whether the 30% figure or the 80% figure is driving the effect. Rather, we are only interested in testing the comparative static that increasing the perception of bipartisan activity increases confidence in Congress as an institution.

¹⁸ For simplicity of interpretation, we estimated all regressions via ordinary least squares. However, we reestimated all models using ordered logistic regression, and the results were statistically and substantively similar (see online Appendix Tables A6 and A7). Freedman (2008a, 2008b) argues that including pretreatment control variables in a regression framework when analyzing experimental data can produce bias in finite samples. However, Freedman’s concerns only apply to analyses with $N < 500$. Moreover, Green (2009) shows that Freedman employs nonstandard modeling assumptions to achieve his unbiasedness results and that for all practical purposes a sample size of 20 is sufficient to estimate unbiased treatment effects and correct standard errors.

¹⁹ We used the standard question used by the ANES to assess partisanship: “Generally speaking, do you consider yourself a Re-

FIGURE 2 Impact of Bipartisanship on Confidence in Congress by Partisanship (Study 1)



Note: Y-axis represents difference in percentage of respondents having at least "a moderate amount" of confidence in Congress between "bipartisan" condition and "partisan" condition.

confirm this pattern. As shown in the first column of Table 2, the treatment information showing that 80% of passed legislation has bipartisan support significantly increases confidence in Congress as compared to information showing a much lower rate of bipartisanship on introduced legislation ($\beta_1 = .031, p = .021$, two-tailed). We can use the estimates of the effects of party identification on the dependent variable to put this treatment effect into context. Given that the survey was conducted when Democrats controlled both chambers, it is unsurprising that Democrats have more confidence in Congress than Republicans. Strong Republicans' level of confidence was .09 units less than Independents, and strong Democrats' level of confidence was .16 units more than Independents. The effect of the bipartisan framing is about 12% of the effect of party identification. This is quite large given that party identification is considered to be one of the most important explanatory variables in the study of political behavior (Campbell et al. 1960).

To calibrate these results against a baseline, we can compare them to respondents' overall approval of Congress. Prior to receiving any treatment information, 43% of respondents strongly disapproved of Congress' job performance. Forty-six percent of respondents reported having little or no confidence in Congress in the "bipartisan" condition; this figure was 55% in the "partisan" condition. Although we did not include an explicit manipulation check,²² these results suggest that the treatments achieved their desired objectives.

²² We did not include an explicit manipulation check for two reasons. First, the treatment information is sufficiently unambiguous to demonstrate the proposed theoretical mechanism. Second, in-

TABLE 2 OLS Regressions Predicting Confidence in Congress (Study One)

β_1 : Bipartisan Version	.03*	.01	.01
	(.01)	(.02)	(.02)
β_2 : Strong Republican	-.09***	-.10***	-
	(.02)	(.03)	
β_3 : Weak Republican	.02	-.01	-
	(.03)	(.04)	
β_4 : Weak Democrat	.09***	.07	-
	(.02)	(.04)	
β_5 : Strong Democrat	.16***	.13***	-
	(.02)	(.02)	
β_6 : Bipartisan Version \times Strong Republican	-	.01	-
		(.04)	
β_7 : Bipartisan Version \times Weak Republican	-	.05	-
		(.05)	
β_8 : Bipartisan Version \times Weak Democrat	-	.05	-
		(.05)	
β_9 : Bipartisan Version \times Strong Democrat	-	.05	-
		(.03)	
Strong Partisans	-	-	.02
			(.02)
Weak Partisans	-	-	.03
			(.03)
Bipartisan Version \times Strong Partisans	-	-	.04
			(.03)
Bipartisan Version \times Weak Partisans	-	-	.05
			(.04)
γ_1 : Age	-.08*	-.08*	-.09*
	(.03)	(.03)	(.04)
γ_2 : Male	-.06***	-.06***	-.07***
	(.01)	(.01)	(.02)
γ_3 : White	-.01	-.01	-.04*
	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)
γ_4 : Education	.02	.02	.05*
	(.02)	(.02)	(.03)
γ_5 : Media Use	-.06*	-.06*	-.08**
	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)
Constant	.40***	.41***	.45***
	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)
N	987	987	987
R ²	.20	.21	.08

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05 (two-tailed).

cluding a manipulation check question after the dependent variable of interest may have induced consistency bias. After reporting their level of confidence in Congress, respondents may have then rationalized their response to the manipulation check to be in line with their initial report. Nonetheless, our estimated treatment effects can be interpreted as "intent-to-treat" effects, which may have been even larger if we isolated our analyses to respondents for whom the manipulation was successful.

This treatment effect was not moderated by partisanship per theoretical expectations. Bipartisanship is universally considered a positive trait of Congress as an institution, regardless of one's partisan leanings. As shown in the second column of Table 2, none of the interaction terms between partisanship and the treatment dummy are statistically significant at conventional levels. Moreover, we fail to reject the null hypothesis that β_6 , β_7 , β_8 , and β_9 are jointly equal to zero ($p = .61$). Also, none of the coefficients associated with the interaction term are significantly different from one another, meaning that the treatment effects were constant across partisan subgroups. We also estimated a model pooling Republican and Democratic respondents and including dummy variables for "strong partisans," "weak partisans," and interactions between these two dummies and the "bipartisan" treatment. As shown in the third column of Table 2, we find that there are no significant differences between Independents, weak partisans, and strong partisans with respect to the treatment effect. Hence, Americans of all partisan leanings are more confident in Congress when informed that it has engaged in more bipartisan activity.

This study suggests that partisan conflict lowers the standing of Congress in the public's eyes. This is true not only for Independents, but also for Americans across the partisan spectrum. Thus, when evaluating bipartisan cooperation in the abstract, the public is generally supportive of members of Congress working with members of the opposite party. These experimental findings are consistent with previous observational (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995) and aggregate-level (Ramirez 2009) studies showing that partisan conflict decreases congressional approval. However, it is important to note that the public votes for individual members, not for a party or for Congress as a whole. Although the public may not prefer high levels of partisanship in Congress, individual citizens have no vote over aggregate congressional behavior as the electoral pressures fall on individual members rather than on the institution as a whole. Therefore, in the second experimental study, we assess whether mass preferences for bipartisanship in the abstract apply to the behavior of individual members.

Study 2: Approval of Members Design

In Study 2, we explored how partisan conflict affects the public's view of members of Congress. There are a number of ways we could portray members as engaging in partisan or bipartisan behavior, including presenting their voting

records and their cosponsorship coalitions. As the most direct test of partisan behavior, we decided to examine roll-call voting behavior, which may be more intuitively understandable than cosponsorship coalitions, which requires respondents to have some knowledge of legislative procedure. Our interest in this experimental design is not to capture the actual information that members communicate to voters in campaigns, but rather to quantify the more qualitative information that members deliver. For example, former Senator Gordon Smith (R-OR), a moderate from a Democratic-leaning state, said in a 2008 campaign advertisement, "I'm Gordon Smith and I approve working across party lines" (Smith 2008). The narrator of the ad mentioned Smith's bipartisan work with Democrats such as Senator Barack Obama and Governor Ted Kulongoski on environmental legislation.

We asked respondents to evaluate a member of Congress based on his voting behavior. Democrats were asked to evaluate Bud Cramer (D-AL), Republicans were asked to evaluate Steve LaTourette (R-OH), and Independents were randomly assigned to one of the two members.²³ We did not present respondents with their actual member of Congress because most legislators' voting behaviors do not vary dramatically from year to year, requiring deceptive information (that a clearly conservative/liberal member was moderate, or vice versa) that would decrease the ecological validity of the findings.²⁴ Both Cramer and LaTourette were unique among their parties in actually having a dramatic change in their voting records in the two-year period before the administration of the survey.

Respondents were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In one condition, we assigned respondents to view the member's voting history in 2007, which almost always toed the party line:

Some members of Congress work with members of their own party almost all of the time. Other

²³ We based this assignment upon the first question used by the ANES to assess partisanship: "Generally speaking, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?" We treated those who did not answer "Republican" or "Democrat" as Independents.

²⁴ Asking respondents about their own member of Congress may have decreased treatment effects because respondents would have greater pretreatment information about the legislators and therefore may have been immune to deceptive information. Our design attempts to capture how constituents react to information about bipartisan activity undertaken by their own member by creating the counterfactual of interest—how a particular member is perceived when he or she appears to be working solely with copartisans compared to when he or she attempts to reach across the aisle. Thus, our design is intended to minimize pretreatment bias while still keeping our study in the context of the real world.

members work with members of both parties.²⁵ On key issues identified by the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) [American Conservative Union (ACU)] in 2007, Representative Bud Cramer (AL-5) [Steve LaTourette (OH-14)] almost always voted the Democratic [Republican] position.

In the second condition, respondents viewed the member's 2006 record, which was more bipartisan:

Some members of Congress work with members of their own party almost all of the time. Other members work with members of both parties. On key issues identified by the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) [American Conservative Union (ACU)] in 2006, Representative Bud Cramer (AL-5) [Steve LaTourette (OH-14)] took the Democratic [Republican] position on about half the votes and the Republican [Democratic] position on about half the votes.

The first sentence of the blurb is intended to focus the respondent's attention on the member's level of intraparty collaboration. Hence, we communicate various aspects of partisan conflict that citizens might find distasteful: ideological extremity, lack of accommodation and cooperation, and incivility.

Comparing approval ratings between conditions allows us to assess whether citizens had more favorable opinions of members who engage in partisan activity, contributing to congressional polarization. By simply changing the year of the voting record—which should be immaterial to respondents—we are simultaneously able to manipulate bipartisan legislative behavior, hold the member constant, and remain truthful to respondents.

Measures

After the blurb about voting behavior was presented, respondents were asked, "Based on this information, do you approve or disapprove of the job Representative Cramer [LaTourette] is doing in Congress?" with the following five response options: "strongly approve," "somewhat approve," "neither approve nor disapprove," "somewhat disapprove," and "strongly disapprove." This 5-point measure served as the principal dependent variable of interest. The main independent variable was a

dummy indicating whether respondents were assigned to the condition showing bipartisan voting behavior, with the party line voting blurb as the baseline. While we did not explicitly provide a control condition, the common content did include an item asking respondents about their overall approval of their member of Congress on a 4-point scale ranging from "strongly disapprove" to "strongly approve" (question CC335rep), which can be used as a baseline.

Although we are ultimately interested in how perceptions of bipartisanship affect voting decisions, asking respondents about their vote intentions for a member that would never appear on their ballot may have been confusing. Consequently, we use job approval as the dependent variable of interest. Nonetheless, our findings do speak to vote choice as approval strongly predicts voting intentions. Among respondents who reported voting for the incumbent House member, 48% strongly approved of the member's job performance and an additional 42% approved somewhat. In contrast, among respondents who reported voting for the challenger, only 2% strongly approved of the incumbent and 13% somewhat approved ($\chi^2(3) = 269.8, p < .001$).

Methods

In order to estimate the overall treatment effect, we estimated the following regression model:

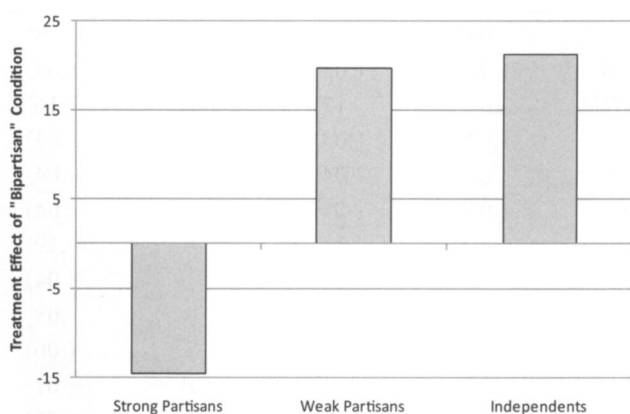
$$A_i = \alpha + \beta_1 B_i + \beta_2 SP_i + \beta_3 WP_i + \gamma \mathbf{x}_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (3)$$

where i indexes respondent, A_i represents approval of the member, B_i represents the bipartisanship treatment dummy, SP_i and WP_i represent strong and weak partisans, respectively (with Independents as the omitted group), \mathbf{x}_i represents a vector of demographic controls, and ε_i represents stochastic error. Since respondents are evaluating copartisans, we have no a priori expectation that Democrats or Republicans will approve of the member more (or less). This is in contrast to Study 1, where Democratic control of Congress suggested that Democratic respondents would have more confidence in Congress than Republican respondents. As a result, we pool Democratic and Republican respondents together. Nonetheless, we also analyzed the data separately for Democrats and Republicans as described below.

To assess the moderating effect of strength of partisanship, we estimated the following model:

$$A_i = \alpha + \beta_1 B_i + \beta_2 SP_i + \beta_3 WP_i + \beta_4 (SP_i \times B_i) + \beta_5 (WP_i \times B_i) + \gamma \mathbf{x}_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (4)$$

²⁵ Which one of the first two sentences of the paragraph came first was randomized.

FIGURE 3 Impact of Bipartisanship on Approval of Members by Partisanship (Study 2)

Note: Y-axis represents difference in percentage of respondents either "somewhat" or "strongly" approving of Cramer [LaTourette] between "bipartisan" condition and "partisan" condition.

β_1 represents the treatment effect among Independents. Similar to equation (2), $\beta_1 + \beta_4$ represents the treatment effect among strong partisans, whereas β_4 represents the *difference* in the treatment effect between strong partisans and Independents. Again, because we do not expect baseline differences between Democrats and Republicans in their approval of copartisans, we examine the moderating effect of strength of partisanship rather than both the strength and direction of partisanship (as we did in Study 1).

Results

Overall, Americans were not more favorable to members who exhibited a less polarized voting record, but there was significant heterogeneity by strength of partisanship. As illustrated in Figure 3, strong identifiers negatively respond to the member when told that he is engaging in bipartisan behavior, whereas weak identifiers and Independents are positively disposed to bipartisanship, which nets to an overall null effect. Returning to the statistical models in equations (3) and (4), we first show the results pooling Democrats, Republicans, and Independents (and accordingly evaluations of both Cramer and LaTourette) together. The first column of Table 3 presents coefficient estimates from equation (3). The bipartisan information relative to the partisan information did not significantly increase approval of the member.²⁶ However, the effects vary significantly by partisan attachment. Whereas Inde-

²⁶ We used the member approval question and the congressional approval question in the common content as baselines with which

pendents and weak partisans were supportive of bipartisan behavior, strong Democrats and Republicans actually approved of the members *less* when told they voted with the opposing party. The second column of Table 3 presents coefficient estimates from equation (4). Among Independents, the treatment effect is positive and statistically significant ($\beta_1 = .108, p < .001$), indicating that Independents in the bipartisan treatment condition approved of the member nearly .11 units more than Independents in the partisan condition. Compared to Independents, the treatment effect was significantly more negative among strong partisans ($\beta_4 = -.183, p < .001$). Moreover, strong partisans approved of the member significantly *less* when told he voted with members of the opposite party ($\beta_2 + \beta_4 = -.075, p < .001$).

Finally, weak Democrats and Republicans were also positively disposed to bipartisanship and behaved much more like Independents than strong partisans. The interaction term between the treatment dummy and the weak partisan dummy (β_5) was statistically insignificant, meaning that weak partisans and Independents were statistically indistinguishable with respect to their response to the treatment information. Analyzing the treatment effect within the subgroup, weak partisans were more approving of the member when he was portrayed as bipartisan ($\beta_3 + \beta_5 = .116, p < .001$). Despite their partisan affiliations, weak partisans have preferences for bipartisanship that are more similar to Independents than to strong partisans, as the treatment effect was significantly different between strong and weak partisans ($\beta_4 - \beta_5 = -.191, p < .001$). We also replicated our analyses examining the Cramer and LaTourette blurbs separately. As shown in columns 3–6 of Table 3, the estimates are similar to the pooled results. Hence, whereas strong partisans were actually negatively affected by bipartisan legislative behavior, this effect was offset by approval of bipartisan behavior among Independents and weak partisans.

Discussion

The findings from Study 1 provide microlevel evidence consistent with extant aggregate-level findings and demonstrate little heterogeneity within the public by

to compare the treatment effects. Constituents will, of course, on average exhibit higher support for their own member than from another district. Forty-five percent of respondents either strongly or somewhat approved of their own member of Congress, and 20% either strongly or somewhat approved of Congress as a whole. In the "bipartisan" condition, 32% of respondents either strongly or somewhat approved of the target member; this figure was 27% in the "partisan" condition.

TABLE 3 OLS Regressions Predicting Approval of Members of Congress (Study 2)

	All Respondents		Democrats		Republicans	
β_1 : Bipartisan Version	.02 (.01)	.11*** (.02)	.04* (.02)	.13*** (.03)	.00 (.02)	.08* (.03)
β_2 : Strong Partisans	.07*** (.02)	.17*** (.02)	.08*** (.02)	.17*** (.03)	.06** (.02)	.16*** (.03)
β_3 : Weak Partisans	.01 (.02)	.00 (.03)	.02 (.03)	.04 (.04)	-.01 (.03)	-.04 (.04)
β_6 : Bipartisan Version \times Strong Partisans	-	-.18*** (.03)	-	-.18*** (.04)	-	-.19*** (.04)
β_7 : Bipartisan Version \times Weak Partisans	-	.01 (.04)	-	-.05 (.05)	-	.08 (.06)
γ_1 : Age	-.03 (.04)	-.04 (.03)	-.05 (.05)	-.06 (.05)	-.01 (.05)	-.01 (.05)
γ_2 : Male	-.02 (.01)	-.02 (.01)	-.01 (.02)	-.01 (.02)	-.03 (.02)	-.03 (.02)
γ_3 : White	.01 (.02)	.01 (.02)	.02 (.02)	.02 (.02)	-.01 (.03)	.00 (.03)
γ_4 : Education	-.01 (.02)	-.02 (.02)	.00 (.03)	-.02 (.03)	-.02 (.04)	-.02 (.04)
γ_5 : Media Use	.05 (.03)	.05 (.03)	.02 (.04)	.02 (.04)	.08* (.04)	.07 (.04)
Constant	.51*** (.03)	.47*** (.03)	.50*** (.03)	.46*** (.04)	.53*** (.04)	.49*** (.04)
N	965	965	528	528	437	437
R ²	.04	.09	.05	.08	.04	.11

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05 (two-tailed).

strength of partisanship. When combined with the findings from Study 2, the results offer a new way to think about party conflict, representation, and mass preferences. A priori, we could have expected a number of potential positive findings, including preferences for partisanship among members and partisanship in the institution; preferences for bipartisanship among members and bipartisanship in the institution; preferences for partisanship among members and bipartisanship in the institution; or preferences for bipartisanship among members and partisanship in the institution. As mentioned previously, theories of party cues and partisan rationalization would predict the first outcome. In contrast, previous findings of general unhappiness with discord in Congress would predict the second outcome. Yet, we find the third outcome, which is both consistent with our theoretical expectations and helps resolve some existing questions in the literature, such as why we have observed persistent polarization and discord in Congress despite the damage it provides collectively to the institution as a whole.

What are the implications of these findings for our understanding of polarization in Congress? First, since the median voter may differ in partisan strength across districts, these results may help explain why bipartisan voting and cosponsorship behavior is most prevalent among members from marginal districts and less prevalent among members from safe districts. Second, strong partisans may support abstract conceptions of bipartisanship, but not when specifically applied to the voting behavior of a copartisan member of Congress. This is similar to the commonly found pattern in the literature on political tolerance (e.g., McClosky 1964; Prothro and Grigg 1960), which finds that Americans support civil liberties as abstract principles, but not when applied in specific circumstances or when applied to unpopular groups such as communists and atheists. Thus, our understanding of representation and the extent to which researchers judge members as responsive may need to be conditioned on what segments of the electorate members are responding to. Whereas a partisan Congress is not representative of the preferences of the public as a whole, individual

members may be representative even when they engage in partisan behavior.

Finally, these results reconceptualize previous explanations of public attitudes toward Congress positing that the public's negative perception of the institution stems from members denigrating it for electoral benefit. Early work by Fenno (1975, 1978) observed that people are generally favorable toward their own member of Congress but are much less positive in their evaluations of Congress more generally, consistent with members running for Congress by running against Congress. Subsequent work on "Fenno's paradox" suggests that people use different criteria for evaluating their own member than for evaluating Congress as a whole. For instance, Parker and Davidson (1979) and Born (1990) argue that whereas Congress is judged (poorly) on the basis of the process and output of lawmaking, individual members are judged (favorably) on the basis of constituency service and personal characteristics. Actions such as casework and position taking can assist members in building a personal vote and increasing support among their constituents (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987) but may not translate into positive evaluations of Congress as an institution. Mutz and Flemming (1999) suggest a social-psychological process of negative perceptual biases when making evaluations in the aggregate, combined with positive perceptual biases when evaluating the local or personal, leading citizens to use different criteria when evaluating Congress versus individual Congresspersons.

In contrast, our findings offer an alternative understanding of Fenno's paradox, suggesting that even when citizens evaluate *similar* criteria, what people want from individual members is different from what they want from Congress as a whole. Although the public generally rebukes Congress in the aggregate for partisan bickering, some citizens reward individual members for eschewing bipartisan cooperation. Hence, we present a new paradox: voters' displeasure with discord in Congress as a macrolevel institution is due to their support of those same behaviors performed at the microlevel by members of that institution. Simply put, citizens disapprove of Congress because it is composed of officials with characteristics they like. This paradox is explained by some voters' inconsistent standards of evaluating similar behaviors by level of the institution.

Hence, this study addresses the question raised by previous studies (e.g., Ramirez 2009) that voters are less approving of Congress when it engages in partisan conflict but that members continue to engage in discord. Although citizens (including strong partisans) approve of Congress more when it effuses an image of bipartisanship, individual members—particularly those from safe dis-

tricts characterized by primary election competition—are *individually* incentivized to behave in a partisan manner, thereby harming the *collective* image of the institution. While Cox and McCubbins (1993) observed that parties in legislatures can wield selective benefits to solve collective action problems and compel members to behave in the interest of the party brand, no similar institution exists for Congress as a whole to protect its reputation.

In addition to addressing an important problem, our studies also raise additional questions that can be explored by subsequent research. For instance, how do voters respond to polarization on other forms of legislative behavior, such as the formation of bill cosponsorship coalitions? Due to agenda-setting power, members have less flexibility in demonstrating bipartisanship on roll-call votes. Can bipartisan cosponsorship by members offset the perception of increased rancor and partisanship on roll-call voting? An experiment in which members' activities in both of these areas is manipulated can help address these questions. In addition to exploring the impact of bipartisanship on evaluations of Congress and individual members, future studies can also include evaluations of specific pieces of legislation, examining those with bipartisan versus partisan support. Subsequent research can vary both the substantive content of legislation and its bipartisan nature to see how much the policy substance of a bill matters in voters' minds, compared to the cue of bipartisan support. Examining public opinion related to Congress and its actions can potentially shed light on important theoretical debates, particularly those which posit the presence of an electoral connection.

In addition, future work ought to explore why bipartisanship is preferred by strong partisans in general, but not for individual members of Congress. One possibility is that strong partisans prefer that copartisan members engage in partisan behavior because the member is seen as protecting their interests. However, if these individuals view bipartisanship in Congress as a whole as occurring when the opposing party compromises its position (but when their own party does not), this seemingly paradoxical set of positions makes sense. That is, bipartisanship occurs when the other party moves from their preferred position. Leveraging differences in expectations for how likely "your side" prevails when they are in the majority versus minority may help uncover whether people see bipartisanship as leading to more "wins" or "losses" for their side than would have occurred in the absence of bipartisanship.

Beyond the specific topic of inquiry in this article, our results speak to a number of important questions in the broader study of Congress and electoral accountability in political institutions. For example, this research

suggests that even in a period of anti-incumbent sentiment and proclaimed desires among the public for greater interparty cooperation, many members of Congress may end up better off engaging in partisan conflict. Additionally, from a comparative perspective, our results suggest that confidence in political institutions may be lower in single-member district electoral systems when citizen preferences over who is representing their districts conflicts with preferences for legislative behavior in the institution at large. Since the public votes for members of Congress, rather than for parties as in parliamentary systems, the incentives for partisanship by individual members may trump the collective incentives for bipartisanship.

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Appendix S1:

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